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Dussel, Enrique (2013) *Ethics of Liberation In The Age of Globalisation and Exclusion*. Duke University Press (United States of America), xxiii + 716 pp £22.99 pbk.

Enrique Dussel, in *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalisation and Exclusion* undertakes the major challenge of formulating a narrative of emancipation in the context of crises of grand emancipatory narratives. Based on the thorough and detailed critique of the foundations of Western philosophy, Dussel proposes the design of a new ethics that takes into account not only the oppressive nature of capitalism but also the historical distribution of power in what the author calls geopolitics. The aim is 'to lay the bases for new horizons of strategic and tactical ethical reasoning grounding in the methaethics of liberation' (xviii). Latin America, due to its peripheral place in the distribution given by the Modern world-system becomes, therefore, a 'privilege' site from where it becomes possible to 'reason' a new ethics of liberation.

For Dussel, it is the combination of capitalism and colonialism that is leading humanity to a tragic and unprecedented conflagration, to a collective suicide. He finds that it is the actual point of departure of Western philosophy what needs to be displaced in order to recreate a new ethics that can lead to new revolutionary utopias. It was the establishment of the Hellenocentrism the moment when the world-system actually started having a centre, and consequently, multiple subordinated peripheries. This was not the case in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BC when the Egyptian-Mesopotamian era constituted a world operated without a centre, and the culture was the 'affirmation of life', rather than reason. He says that Amerindia as subsystem established a foundational moment of Modernity and its integration was naturalised through a process of rationalisation which hollowed its particularity and made it governable, under social imaginaries that crystallised its subordinated position. The 'crises of Modernity', for the author, implies ignoring the peripheral world which sits as simple spectators rather than subjects of transformation. The negation of Modernity becomes therefore what Dussel believes comes first in the rebuilding of a new and truly ethics of liberation.

Against Taylor's 'modern self' Dussel poses the construction of the 'peripheral self', built on the 'materiality of human life' and the analysis of the exercise of critical practical reason, anchored in the experience from the standpoint of the historical practice of the victim (p. 208). In an argument similar to the politics of aesthetics understood as *regimes of visibility and invisibility* (Rancière, 2011), Dussel states that the affirmation of the victim happens beyond 'being', if being is the foundation of the system. The victim is 'the other', distinct from the system, which is concealed and ultimately reveals Modernity as a totality, a closed system which cannot be transformed from within but against it.

Dussel unfolds his thesis in two parts, six chapters, one introduction and two useful appendixes. The first part is dedicated to criticise the foundation of Western notion of ethics and also to pose, in relation to the latter, his 'goodness claim' (p.108). The goodness claim in Dussel's work aims to go beyond formalists and materialists as form and content are presented as interdependent dimensions in the development of 'practical truths' (content) vis-à-vis intersubjective validity (form). Like Hegel and Marx, Dussel thinks the constitution of 'the good subject' in three dialectical

movements: 1) the negation of the victims' otherness by the victims themselves; 2) the affirmation of the 'community of victims' which critically negates the victims' status, poses a threat to the system and equally creates the communitarian space for symmetrical recognition; and, finally, the third movement is about the birth of the *praxis of liberation* in the strict sense because the systemic negation of the victims is in itself negated in a process which is destructive and equally creative and liberating in an ethically feasible manner (pp. 211-213).

In his model of liberation Dussel seems to have come full circle, i.e. departing from Marxism only to arrive to an equally problematic Marxist-like understanding of the logic of emergence of the 'good subject', replacing the working class for the victims of Modernity. Dussel's conception of ethics is normative and hence seeks the replacement of one totality (Modernity) by another (ethical) totality dictated by the liberated victims. This means the 'end of history' overcame by a new fully structured historical moment. The task ahead for the progressive forces of the continent and of the world seem to be precisely revealing the fictional fullness of Modernity, its incomplete hegemonic structuration which opens up radical and multiple opportunities for plural emancipations rather than one unique and singular liberation.

In Dussel's book ethical actions can only be understood in relation to the fullness of being, i.e. the 'good subject', produced within the community of victims, emerging from the margins of the world system fully enacted against the Modern form of domination. However, in the movement of transition from oppression to liberation, the (becoming) subject will forge a variety of partial actions contaminated with experience, with discourse, and therefore with pre-existing object and places. Although Dussel does try to integrate the experience and also tries to reject the division between form and content, he only partially integrates the former and does not fully give account of the latter. The radical integration of experience into social theory means discovering the undecidability of things which are presented as being either joined or separated (Laclau, 2002). Dussel does not undertake the necessary deconstruction of 'the excluded' but instead assumes its homogeneous, symmetrical existence. Likewise, he not only presents a (universal) criterion of ethics but also *names* the subject of liberation and hence transforms what should be 'ethical investment' (Laclau, 2002) into normative ethics. Again, liberation needs to be thought in plural, integrating the hybridity of the popular, because the creation of contingently unconditional spaces of freedom and equality will be the result of rebellious contaminated collective action within an entirely conditioned universe.

#### References

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Juan Pablo Ferrero  
University of Bath